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ORATION,

DELIVERED AT MENDON,

JULY 4, 1796,

AT THE CELEBRATION

OF THE

Twentieth Anniversary

OF

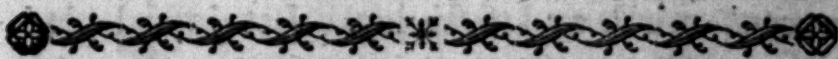
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

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A N
O R A T I O N.

My respected Friends and Fellow-Citizens,

PERMIT me to address you, on this twentieth anniversary of American liberty and independence. An epoch of national dignity ; the regeneration of liberty from the ruins of despotism ; the emancipation of a large portion of mankind from oppression and slavery. These are some of the leading features of that memorable event, which guarantied to America her political salvation. An event, which, whilst it engages the wonder and admiration of distant nations, cannot fail to interest the particular attention of the citizens of these United States.

WE are, at this time, called upon, neither to celebrate the birth day, nor the coronation of a hereditary tyrant. Neither are we commanded to join the procession of a conqueror, to perpetuate his acts of infamy and disgrace.

No ; 'tis the birth day of liberty, rational liberty, and the unalienable rights of man, which we celebrate. Let rigid economy, for a moment, resign the empire of reason to innocent

nocent mirth and festivity. Let joyful gladness beam on every countenance. We are, this day, assembled in commemoration of exalted deeds ; deeds meriting the highest eulogium. Let us join United America, in the grand chorus of praise. Let us proclaim to the world the glad tidings of liberty, established on the broad basis of national glory.

AMERICA has not, as at the present, always enjoyed the rich blessings of peace and plenty. War, once, deluged our country in blood. Our verdant fields were crimsoned with human gore. Many of our bravest and best citizens fell devoted victims to its ravages. Long was the conflict, and doubtful the issue ; till, at length, virtue and patriotism completely triumphed over veteran discipline, to the salvation of our country.

THE numerous circumstances, attending the late revolution in America, as recorded in history, are both singular and interesting. They hold out to the world " the tremendous uncertainty of all human grandeur." They afford to kings and tyrants a striking lesson of their own weakness and folly. They demonstrate to the despot, that the rod of terror will not always insure blind adoration to him who wields it ;—that a government, built on any other foundation than reason and the affections of the citizens, will never be able to withstand the floodtide of opposition.

OUR forefathers, persecuted in their native country, fled to America. Surrounded, on every

every side, by the most imminent dangers, they patiently endured every hardship and cruelty, but death, in pursuit of liberty. They presumptuously hoped, that a distance of more than three thousand miles from their unnatural parent, would effectually screen them from her cruelties. Neglected, in their infant state, they must have perished, had not their own unparalleled vigilance, wisdom, and economy, raised them to opulence and power. 'Twas now, they experienced, afresh, the same unabated system of oppression, exercised towards them in America, which had driven them into the wilderness. Their sudden and unexpected opulence drew on them the united envy and jealousy of Great-Britain. Laws were enacted for the sole purpose of oppressing and impoverishing the then colonies. The Americans beheld the injustice, in silent despair : till, at length, a righteous indignation roused them into action. The heavenly spark was, at last, by repeated and reiterated exertions, blown into a blaze ; and with its bright effulgence illumined this western world.

THE Angel of liberty, descending from his bright abode, unfurled the sacred standard. The shrill trump of war was blown : A war, on our part, founded on the eternal principles of self-preservation, could not fail, ultimately, to be successful.

IF we take a retrospective view of the critical situation of our country, when hostilities commenced ; the inhabitants thinly scattered

ed over an extensive territory ; unacquainted with the intricate science of war ; and, what was still more embarrassing, entirely destitute of the means of regular defence ; the issue, in the eye of impartial reason, at best, on the part of America, was doubtful. But desperate cases require daring remedies. The opposition was already begun. To shrink back and fail, would have been revolt and treason. Every effort was made, every nerve was strained : And the result is well known, as being highly favourable to liberty and the rights of man.

THE war, at first, on the part of America, was a war of redress. But it was soon discovered, that the object was unequal to the magnitude of the contest. Nothing less than the independence of America could reward the manly exertions of her brave citizens. The new object of contention was, boldly, proclaimed to the astonished world. The glorious tidings encouraged the firm ; confirmed the wavering ; and reanimated the drooping. From this moment, the enemy beheld the unexpected opposition with astonishment. Consternation painted, in their guilty imaginations, all the horrors of an unsuccessful war. After a seven years' contention, in fruitless efforts to conquer America, Great-Britain, at length, exhausted in men and money, gave up what she could no longer retain. Peace was, once more, restored to our long desolated country. But prosperity had deserted our borders.

Government

Government was prostrated, and every thing appeared, rapidly, tending towards anarchy and confusion. At this awful crisis of affairs, a new government was contemplated. To form a constitution, calculated to reduce into union and harmony the opposite and clashing interests of thirteen discordant states, required the utmost stretch of human wisdom. The grand experiment was, at length, made ; and it succeeded beyond the most sanguine expectations. It produced a constitution, the legitimate offspring of great and exalted abilities. And do we exaggerate, when we pronounce it, a model of political perfection ?

HISTORY unfolds a new era in the science of government. The reign of liberty and prosperity over this western world ; order and firmness restored to a tottering state ; national faith and honor built on the everlasting foundation of justice.

WE claim not the liberty of nature. We glory in the possession of rational liberty ; we glory in submitting to the mild government of laws ; laws calculated to promote the greatest general good of community. 'Tis the uncivilized man who exults in the liberty of nature. A liberty wholly inconsistent with a civilized life. Man, united in society, no longer remains the man of the wilderness. He is obliged to resign a certain share of his freedom to that society, which, in return for the sacrifice he makes, guaranties to him the quiet and unmolested enjoyment of the residue.

due. Hence we have the origin of true government : A voluntary association, or compact, entered into betwixt individuals, mutually relinquishing a part of their liberty, with a view, the more effectually, to enjoy the remainder. A government built on any other foundation, or having any other object in view, does not answer the designs of government : 'Tis evidently oppression, which continually, from the first moments of its existence, tends to dissolution.

THE ancients received for a maxim, that a great and powerful nation could never prosper and flourish under a Republican Government. This error grew out of their ignorance of the genuine principles of Republicanism. Instead of meeting in council, by their representatives, men chosen from their own body, men who had signalized themselves by their wisdom, or their talents, they rushed together in one indiscriminate mass. Assembled, in this manner, in the heat and paroxysm of party, they proceeded to the discussion of topics, which required the closest investigation of cool reason and unbiaſſed judgment. The national legislature, formed thus, of the unprincipled and ignorant, was a fit tool, in the hands of powerful individuals, to accomplish their wicked purposes. We may hence account for the frequent revolutions and conspiracies, which so often prostrated the sacred rights of humanity at the accursed shrine of despotism.

AMERICA enjoys the advantages, possessed
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by ancient republics, without being exposed to their dangers and imperfections. No powerful individual riots on our liberties. The rulers, as well as the ruled, are strictly amenable to the laws of their country. The Constitution sets the grand arbiters of unlimited power. Her righteous decisions no human arm can withstand. A glorious system of checks and balances forms an effectual barrier to unprincipled ambition.

WASHINGTON stands at the political helm. The Ship of State, under his auspices, will have a safe and prosperous voyage. No pirate shall ever rob him of his prize. Amidst contending storms, WASHINGTON moves in native dignity towards the haven of safety. Durst any one question the ability or the integrity of the "tried Patriot"? The American Hero stands aloof, unaffected by base ingratitude. Her malignant shafts can, never, reach his exalted soul. Should foreign powers, ever, ungenerously attempt to influence our politics, their attempts must prove abortive. Our citizens are too much enlightened, and too far initiated into their own interest, to credit base and groundless insinuations.

OUR Constitution is the grand palladium of our liberties. Whilst that remains unviolated, we are in little danger of being deprived of our freedom. England may boast of her *Magna Charta*, of her *Bill of Rights*, extorted from tyrants. America boasts of a CONSTITUTION, founded on the united suffrages of a
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free,

free, enlightened, and independent people ; a Constitution boldly held up to the view of the world ; a mirror, in which every citizen may read his own political character.

IF we contrast our own happy situation with that of the European world, involved in all the complicated horrors of a desolating war, we, certainly, have additional inducements to rejoice on this day. No field of battle, heaped with the slain, presents itself to our view. No village, wrapt in flames, terrifies the affrightened inhabitants. No arbitrary exactions rob the poor man of his scanty pittance. Here, the virtuous citizen can set, under his own vine and figtree, and feast, unmolested, upon the abundant fruits of his own industry. Our commerce extends over the broad swelling ocean. Our flag flies unfurled in every sea. The same enterprising spirit which so eminently characterized our pious ancestors, is still a prominent feature of their offspring. Wherever prospects of gain rise into view, there you will behold the American countenance. Since the establishment of our federal government, our commerce has increased beyond every rational calculation ; and with some few exceptions, and those, in a great measure, owing to the unavoidable calamities of a war uncommonly destructive, has been uniformly successful. Wealth and opulence flow in upon our country from every quarter of the globe. Our national resources are rapidly increasing, and bid fair, in a short time,
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to become as extensive as our territory. The arts and sciences increase and flourish, under the patronage of a generous public. Their salutary influence is felt and acknowledged by a virtuous people. The dark cloud of ignorance and superstition no longer veils our land. The vivifying rays of knowledge have darted athwart the human mind; and by their genial influence, at once, transformed the citizen into an enlightened politician.

SINCE knowledge is the foundation of Republicanism, let us be careful to render the avenues to it easy and accessible. Let us put into the hands of the poor man, as well as the rich, the means of ennobling his nature. No hereditary distinctions, no titles of nobility, will ever be suffered to trample on our equal liberties. Genius and exalted abilities will always receive sufficient encouragement under a free government.

UNITED to the train of important privileges, which we enjoy, the unlimited freedom of the press claims a high and distinguished rank. 'Tis one of the grand pillars of political freedom. It is so essential to the existence of a free government, that to abridge it, would be, wantonly, to hazard the liberties of the people. 'Tis an impartial tribunal, by which men and measures must eventually stand or fall. 'Tis the grand vehicle of national information. Hence tyrants have, uniformly, considered the press as their enemy. They have waged an eternal war against it. They are
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fully sensible, that the firmness and durability of their usurped power depend on the ignorance of mankind, that to let the light of reason into the minds of their subjects would be giving the last and fatal blow to their greatness.

In celebrating this day, let us not pass over, unnoticed, those brave men, who fell martyrs in the glorious cause of liberty and their country. They nobly contended for a rich and magnificent prize. They fell victorious, and in their death sealed, with their blood, our Independence. Let us consecrate their memories by administering the balm of comfort to their unfortunate and distressed friends and families. Let us, from the cheek of the orphan, wipe the swollen tear. 'Tis a sacred debt we owe to the cause of injured humanity. Let us, this day, by our justice and liberality, demonstrate to the world, that, notwithstanding the base assertions to the contrary, gratitude does dwell in the republican bosom.

THE empire of liberty is, yet, confined to a small portion of the globe. The immense regions of Asia and Africa present human nature debased and fallen. Doomed to perpetual chains and bondage, millions, pining unto death, drag on a miserable load of existence. Death to them is a welcome friend, a messenger of peace. He comes to relieve the captive of a burthen, nature can no longer support. Unfortunate man! America weeps over thy miseries, without the power to relieve or help thee.

thee. Ignorance has everlastingly barred the doors of thy cottage against the approach of liberty.

EUROPE presents a more pleasing prospect to the future reign of freedom, in that quarter of the world. Liberty has, already, reared her standard on the banks of the Seine. She has spread her banner over oppressed Frenchmen ; and she is, now, gently inviting the weary of the whole earth to rest under its sacred shadow. " Brave Frenchmen ! Your cause is the cause of universal nature." Your successes shake the tottering thrones of tyrants, which will, one day, entomb their greatness. If Frenchmen, in the first stages of their revolution, sometimes, committed excesses and violence, attribute it to necessity. Our generous allies are humane, as well as brave. We ought to contemplate France, in her critical situation, overthrowing an arbitrary government, cutting one of the principal links in the grand chain of oppression, externally invaded by the united powers of Europe, violently rent by internal factions, desperadoes, sacrilegiously, proftrating every law, both human and divine. Under these circumstances, who can wonder, that France should, sometimes, let slip the reins of moderation ; and give a momentary scope to provoked vengeance ? Far more surprizing, had she never, once, erred from the path of justice.

AFTER contemplating the degradation and disorder which reign in the other quarters of
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the world, what exalted ideas must we entertain of our own happy situation. Here, humanity, shielded from the chilling blasts of tyranny, expands and blossoms, under the mild rays of freedom, producing rich fruits, to gladden the heart of the unfortunate. We are, this day, at peace with the whole creation of mankind. Safety and happiness restored to our extensive frontiers. Our brethren in slavery soon to return into the open bosom of their country. The clouds of contention, which, lately, spread over our political horizon, portending storms and tempests, have happily subsided. Every thing has, at length, returned to its perfect level. Our CONSTITUTION rises gloriously triumphant. May its sacred principles leap the ocean, and run through universal nature, enlightening and animating the ignorant and oppressed of the whole earth.

MAY United America never forget, nor neglect to celebrate, this glorious anniversary. Let us hand down the hallowed lesson to posterity, who, in their turn, will teach the same to their prattling infants. It will be to them a rich, a valuable bequest. As we prize and adore liberty, so let us use every righteous mean, in our power, to render its dominion universal, permanent, and lasting.

Finis.



*The following is copied from the COLUMBIAN CENTINEL of
July 16, 1796.*

MENDON, JULY 5, 1796.

THE anniversary of our National Independence was, yesterday, celebrated in this town, with decent mirth and festivity. An oration (preceded by a well-adapted prayer by the Rev. Mr. ALEXANDER) replete with sentiments that were pertinent and federal, was pronounced by Mr. SOLOMON SIBLEY, A. B. to a respectable auditory of gentlemen and ladies, assembled on the occasion, from this and the neighbouring towns; after which, under an arbour erected for the day, a large and respectable number of gentlemen dined together, and partook of the productions of our happy country, and enjoyed all the social and convivial delight and satisfaction, which this auspicious day ought always to inspire. The following sixteen toasts were given, and drank by the company before they separated, viz.

1. *The Day.* May gratitude ever remind us of this auspicious anniversary.
2. *The President of the United States.*—May we always delight to honour the man who unites all hearts
3. *The Vice-President.*—May his country be long benefited by his great and distinguished talents.
4. *The Constitution and Government of the United States.*—As they have hitherto produced, may they continue to increase, the political happiness of our country.
5. *Governour ADAMS.*—May all his patriotic services be fully repaid, by the gratitude and affection of his fellow-citizens.
6. *The Commonwealth of Massachusetts,* and its patriotic Legislature.
7. *The Republic of France.*—May she soon enjoy the blessings of peace, under a good Government of Laws, and not of Men.
8. *Success to all people,* who are struggling to obtain and secure the just and equal Rights of Man.

9. *A friendly union of all parties into one*, and that one the great whole of the American people, seeking only to increase the honour and prosperity of our common country.

10. *Our Agriculture and Manufactures*.—May they continue to flourish and increase.

11. *Our Commerce*.—May our Stars twinkle, and our Flag be unfurled, and secure respect, in every clime, and amongst all the nations of the habitable world.

12. *An impartial Neutrality* with all the powers at war; and continued peace and prosperity to our happy country.

13. *Speedy peace* to all the contending nations of Europe.

14. *Fayette and Kosciuszko*.—If they are not now, may they soon be liberated from their prisons; and here, in our happy land, enjoy that Liberty and Independence, for which they so nobly fought and bled.

15. *General WAYNE and his brave army*.—May the peace they have secured to our frontiers be perpetual.

16. *Peace and good-will* towards, and a friendly intercourse with, all our brethren of the human race.

Volunteer Toasts—By BEZALEEL TAFT, Esq. *The Clergy*.—As we now have, may we continue to be blessed with a learned and patriotic Clergy.

By Mr. LABAN BATES, of Bellingham. *The old town of Mendon*.—May the cultivation of its land, by its inhabitants, continue to be equal to the richness and fertility of its soil.

